



BEHIND THE OFFERINGS AND PRAYERS: UNCOVERING SYNCRETISM IN THE PRESENTATION OF OFFERINGS IN CATAK HAMLET, KEBONAGUNG VILLAGE

DI BALIK PERSEMBAHAN DAN DOA: MENGUNGKAP SINKRETISME DALAM PENYAJIAN PERSEMBAHAN DI DUNIA CATAK, DESA KEBONAGUNG

Melya Milviana^{1*}, Farikhathul Maulidah², Umi Nur Habibah³, Pasya Nurul Ramadhani⁴,
Khaulah Rizka Awwaliya⁵

^{1*,2,3,4,5}Departement of History, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University
Email: melyamilviana@gmail.com

*email koresponden: melyamilviana@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research examines the manifestation of syncretism in Dusun Catak, Kebonagung Village, Sumowono District, Semarang Regency, with a focus on the tradition of offering *sesajen* and its interaction with Islamic teachings. The aims of this research are to understand how syncretism is manifested in the lives of the Dusun Catak community, to comprehend the history of Dusun Catak, and to analyze the Islamic perspective on the practice of offering *sesajen* carried out by the Dusun Catak community. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method, combining literature study by exploring previous research, conducting direct observations at the research location for four days, and performing in-depth interviews with several informants. The results show that syncretism in Dusun Catak is manifested in a unique form, where the tradition of *sesajen* adapts to Islamic teachings. The Dusun Catak community also preserves the village's historical traditions by passing them down through generations. The placement of *sesajen* is carried out in specific locations. The practice of offering *sesajen* is regarded as a form of local wisdom that is not perceived as deviating from religious norms by the community; although the offerings are placed in various locations and are associated with respect for the ancestors of the Catak community, the practice is understood as part of a cultural tradition that is integrated with the Islamic values upheld by the community.

Keywords : Sesajen, Syncretism, Tradition, Practice.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji manifestasi sinkretisme di Dusun Catak, Desa Kebonagung, Kecamatan Sumowono, Kabupaten Semarang, dengan fokus pada tradisi persembahan sesajen dan interaksinya dengan ajaran Islam. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami bagaimana sinkretisme termanifestasi dalam kehidupan masyarakat Dusun Catak, untuk memahami sejarah Dusun Catak, dan untuk menganalisis perspektif Islam tentang praktik persembahan sesajen yang dilakukan oleh masyarakat Dusun Catak. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, menggabungkan studi literatur dengan mengeksplorasi penelitian sebelumnya, melakukan observasi langsung di lokasi penelitian selama empat hari, dan melakukan wawancara mendalam dengan beberapa informan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sinkretisme di Dusun Catak termanifestasi dalam bentuk yang unik, di



mana tradisi sesajen beradaptasi dengan ajaran Islam. Masyarakat Dusun Catak juga melestarikan tradisi sejarah desa dengan mewariskannya dari generasi ke generasi. Penempatan sesajen dilakukan di lokasi-lokasi tertentu. Praktik persembahan sesajen dianggap sebagai bentuk kearifan lokal yang tidak dianggap menyimpang dari norma-norma agama oleh masyarakat; Meskipun persembahan ditempatkan di berbagai lokasi dan dikaitkan dengan penghormatan kepada leluhur komunitas Catak, praktik ini dipahami sebagai bagian dari tradisi budaya yang terintegrasi dengan nilai-nilai Islam yang dijunjung tinggi oleh komunitas tersebut.

Kata Kunci : Sesajen, Sinkretisme, Tradisi, Praktik.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago, is a remarkable cultural mosaic with a wealth of traditions and astonishing diversity. Stretching from Sabang to Merauke, the country is home to more than 17,000 islands, 300 ethnic groups and 700 regional languages (Farhaeni & Martini, 2023). This diversity is reflected not only in ethnic and linguistic aspects but also in a broad spectrum of beliefs and religious practices. Although Islam is the majority religion with the largest population, Indonesia also recognises five other official religions: Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, as well as various local belief systems (Sirait & Malau, 2022). Within this diverse religious landscape, a fascinating phenomenon is how various local traditions and beliefs interact with the major religions, particularly Islam. This process of acculturation and adaptation has produced unique forms of religious expression across various regions of Indonesia.

Java, as Indonesia's most populous island—home to more than half the country's population—stands as the most prominent example of the dynamic interplay between Islam and local culture. Javanese society is renowned for its rich and complex cultural heritage (Diananda, 2021), which has evolved over centuries through the influence of various civilisations, including Hindu-Buddhist and, later, Islamic traditions. Before the arrival of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism had shaped Java's spiritual landscape for over a thousand years, leaving a profound mark on the society's cosmology and ritual practices. Anita (2016) explains that during the 15th to 16th centuries, in the historical development of Islamic culture in Java, an intriguing cultural phenomenon emerged. This era was marked by the emergence of a cultural form that blended elements from the Hindu-Buddhist tradition with elements derived from Islamic teachings. The process of Islamisation did not simply eradicate pre-existing beliefs and practices. Instead, a complex process of adaptation and negotiation took place between Islamic teachings and local traditions. This phenomenon is known as syncretism, a concept referring to the merging or blending of various elements from different belief systems or traditions.

Etymologically, syncretism derives from the Greek words *syn* and *kretozein* or *kerannynai*, meaning to mix or blend conflicting elements. Syncretism is a process or phenomenon of combining, uniting, or blending various different or even conflicting elements, whether in the context of philosophy, religion, culture, or ideology, with the aim of creating a new, more harmonious and balanced perspective, belief system, or practice (Alimuddin, 2016). According to Mokhtar & Sa'ari (2015), the concept of syncretism covers a broad field, forming the subject of discussion in theology, the history of religion, and anthropology. Since entering the academic sphere, this concept has been defined in various ways, both positively and negatively. In religious studies, the concept of syncretism often provokes controversy as it is perceived to imply impurity or inauthenticity. This concept has sparked debate amongst scholars regarding the phenomenon of the blending of cultural and religious elements within society.

Woodward (2011) argues that what is often regarded as syncretism in Java is in fact a valid form of 'local Islam', in which Islamic teachings are interpreted and practised within Javanese culture. He states that rather than viewing Javanese Islam as a form of syncretism or a deviation from orthodoxy, we should understand it as one of many ways in which Islam can manifest itself within a specific culture. This perspective challenges the simplistic dichotomy between 'pure' Islam and 'syncretic' practices,



emphasising the complexity and fluidity of religious identity within Javanese culture. Manifestations of this syncretism or 'local Islam' can be observed in various rituals and traditions that are still practised to this day. One example is the Nyadran tradition, a ritual performed during certain months, as well as the offering of sesajen. This phenomenon of syncretism or local adaptation of Islam in Java has far-reaching implications, not only in terms of daily religious practice, but also in the formation of cultural identity and broader social dynamics.

Several previous studies have examined the phenomenon of syncretism in Indonesia, particularly in Java. Chakim (2009), in 'A Portrait of Syncretic Islam: Kejawen Ritual Practices?', demonstrates that the arrival of Islam in Java influenced local rituals, creating syncretic practices through a process of dialogue. The study titled 'Javanese Cultural Syncretism and Islam in the Traditional Janengan Art Form' by Hermawan, Zakaria, and Rohmah (2020) extends this understanding to the realm of art. They reveal the fusion of Javanese and Islamic cultures in Javanese-style salawat poetry and the use of offerings in Janengan art performances, demonstrating how syncretism permeates the artistic expressions of the community. Furthermore, Dewi (2018) in "Islamic and Javanese Cultural Syncretism in the Village Purification Ceremony in Purwosari" identified the coexistence of Kejawen rituals such as selamatan and sesajen with Islamic practices such as the recitation of sholawat and prayers of thanksgiving. Extending the scope of syncretism to the realm of architecture, Maulid et al. (2021) in 'The Syncretism of Islamic and Nusantara Architecture in the Central Java Grand Mosque' demonstrate how cultural fusion is also manifested in building design. Their research shows that the Central Java Grand Mosque combines elements of Islamic and Javanese architecture, reflecting syncretism in physical form.

This study focuses on the manifestation of syncretism within the community of Catak Hamlet, located in Kebonagung Village, Sumowono Sub-district, Semarang Regency. Although syncretism has been the subject of various previous studies, this research possesses several characteristics that distinguish it from earlier studies. What distinguishes this study from previous ones lies in three main aspects: the research location, the focus of the study, and the expected outcomes. In terms of location, this study was conducted in Catak Hamlet, Kebonagung Village, Sumowono Sub-district, Semarang Regency, Central Java. This location has not previously been the subject of research, particularly regarding the manifestations of syncretism. Furthermore, the research focus is broader, examining not just one aspect of syncretism but also exploring its various manifestations, community participation, and efforts to preserve syncretic practices. The research findings will be detailed in several sub-sections within the results and discussion chapter. The aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive overview of syncretism in Kebonagung Village, particularly in Catak Hamlet. The research aims to examine demographic conditions, particularly the religions practised, the history of Catak Hamlet, the manifestations of syncretism in Catak Hamlet, and the Islamic perspective on syncretism.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method as its primary approach. The descriptive qualitative research method is a research approach aimed at describing, explaining and validating social phenomena in depth through analysis that focuses on processes and meanings (Ramdhan, 2021). In this method, primary data is generally obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation, as descriptive qualitative research involves the researcher's active participation in the phenomenon under study. Literature review or library research is also an important tool for identifying relevant sources of literature, enriching theoretical understanding, and providing historical and conceptual context for the topic under investigation. Literature review is conducted prior to carrying out interviews and direct observation at the research site. Literature review can be understood as a procedure for collecting and reconstructing data sourced from books, articles, or previous research findings (Adlini et al., 2022). In this study, the literature sources used comprise various texts relevant to the research topic, namely syncretism. For data collection via interviews and observation, the researcher went directly to the research site to gather the necessary data. According to Hasanah (2017), observation is a systematic



process of observation that involves the researcher's biological and psychological aspects to collect data directly from the field. This method encompasses careful observation, active perception, and the recording of relevant information, enabling the researcher to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under study in its natural context. Over a period of four days, the researcher conducted on-site observations at the research location situated in Catak Hamlet, an area within Kebonagung Village, Sumowono Sub-district, Semarang Regency.

The researcher combined observational methods with interviews with a number of informants whilst at the research site. An interview is an interactive process involving two or more individuals, generally conducted in person. In this process, there is a clear division of roles: one party acts as the interviewer, whilst the other acts as the interviewee (Fadhallah, 2021), and in this process, the researcher acts as the interviewer. The interview method used was the in-depth interview. Interviews are conducted individually with informants to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information. As stated by Agusta (2003), this process involves a series of face-to-face meetings between the researcher and each participant, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences, perceptions, and perspectives. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with several key figures in Catak Hamlet and the surrounding area. Among them was Mr Raminto, the 80-year-old village elder of Catak Hamlet, who possesses in-depth knowledge of local history and traditions. Subsequently, an interview was conducted with Mr Nuhadi, the 74-year-old village clerk of Kebonagung, who provided important insights regarding the religious and social aspects of the village. The researchers also interviewed two residents of Catak Hamlet, namely Mr Mindur (55 years old) and Mr Mulyadi (50 years old), to gain perspectives from the general public.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An Overview of Religious Life in the Village of Kebonagung

Kebonagung Village is one of the villages that forms part of Sumowono Sub-district, Semarang Regency, Central Java. Geographically, Kebonagung Village is bounded by Ngadikerso Village to the north, Genteng Village in Jambu Sub-district to the south, Wonokerso Village in Temanggung Regency to the east, and Getas Village in Temanggung Regency to the west. The distance from Kebonagung Village to Sumowono Sub-district is approximately 7.2 km.

According to data from the 2023 Sumowono Sub-district in Figures report, Kebonagung Village covers an area of 5 km², accounting for 8.99% of the sub-district's total area. There are a total of 5 RWs and 17 RTs in Kebonagung Village. The population of Kebonagung Village is recorded as 3,182 people, with more female residents (1,606 people) than male residents (1,576 people). There are 1,145 heads of households in Kebonagung Village, comprising 999 men and 146 women.

Kebonagung Village is classified as a village with a diverse religious landscape. The religions practised by its residents include 2,859 Muslims, 260 Protestants, 61 Buddhists, and 2 people of other faiths (Sumowono Sub-district in Figures, 2023). The religious diversity among the residents of Kebonagung Village does not affect community life. In fact, the community there lives in mutual cooperation and demonstrates strong tolerance.

Uniquely, religious life in Kebonagung Village remains closely linked to the traditions and beliefs of its ancestors. In this regard, there is evidence of syncretism between religious and cultural elements (other beliefs) within a tradition that is still upheld in several hamlets of Kebonagung Village. One example of this syncretism is the Nyadran tradition in Catak Hamlet, Kebonagung Village, the observance of which combines elements of Islam, such as the recitation of the Prophet's prayers, with elements of ancestral belief, such as the offering of ritual food.

The History of Catak Hamlet

The people of Catak Hamlet have preserved their ancestral history from one generation to the next. They believe that upholding the culture that has existed since time immemorial is a form of gratitude to God. The history of Catak Hamlet began with the discovery of the land, which was subsequently developed and named Catak Hamlet by Kyai Ripu and Nyai Ripu. Kyai Ripu and Nyai



Ripu—that is how the people of Catak Village refer to their ancestors who first discovered their land. Kyai Ripu and Nyai Ripu are buried in the public cemetery in Catak Village; their graves lie beneath the largest tree and are surrounded by andong plants forming a hedge (Interview with Mr Raminto, June 2024).



Figure 1. Kyai Ripu and Nyai Ripu Public Cemetery, Catak Hamlet

Source: Personal archive

At the same time, the local community believed in another figure, namely Nyai Kedok, who hailed from Kedu. The story of Nyai Kedok began with an incident experienced by a local resident who owned a plot of land in Catak Hamlet; the resident intended to clear some land on his plot and felled a tree which turned out to be the resting place of Nyai Kedok's spirit. As a result of the resident's actions, Nyai Kedok was displeased and caused the resident to die. The land was subsequently left untended, and the family then asked a villager named Pak Raminto to continue the work on the plot. According to information trusted by the residents of Dusun Catak, Pak Raminto began his work on the plot by tapping the sap from a sago palm and faintly heard the voice of a woman. The rainy weather, accompanied by wind, made Pak Raminto doubt that there was anyone else on the field besides himself, but the voice was heard again and convinced Pak Raminto that there was another figure besides himself. That figure introduced herself as Nyai Kedok and asked to go home because her house had collapsed. Nyai Kedok also asked for a cigarette and betel nut. It was then that Pak Raminto became the caretaker and learnt that the figure who had asked for the 'klaras' cigarettes was known as Bakok, and the one who had asked for the betel nut was known as Bawuk. During her lifetime, it is said that Nyai Kedok intended to build a mosque near Catak Hamlet; however, when Nyai Kedok sought water from Catak Hamlet, they refused to provide it (Interview with Mr Raminto, June 2024).

This legend has another version, widely believed by the residents of Catak Hamlet, in which Nyai Kedok is also known for her spiritual powers, specifically her ability to possess the bodies of local villagers. Through this medium, Nyai Kedok requested that a place be built for her to reside; eventually, a shrine was erected, which is now frequently visited by people from many different regions. The shrine is maintained by a group of young people who also lease the surrounding land to farmers for cultivation. The proceeds from this serve as the primary source of funding for the upkeep of Nyai Kedok's shrine. This is the origin of the tradition whereby, every month of Safar, the villagers visit the shrine of Nyai Kedok's grave, bringing offerings and praying. This is an expression of gratitude for the blessings they have received that year (Interview with Mr Mulyadi, June 2024).



Figure 2. The Site of Nyai Kedok's Tomb

Source: Personal archive



Unlike the spring in Catak Hamlet, the residents of Catak believe that a goddess resides there. They call her Nyai Jonggrang; during certain months, the residents of Catak offer sacrifices, and when they hold major events, they also make offerings at the spring. The water flowing in the spring is believed to cure various illnesses; many people come from different regions to Catak Hamlet to bathe in the spring in the hope that their ailments will be healed. Furthermore, the residents of Catak Hamlet also believe there is a figure that guards the hamlet every night; some residents claim to have seen it, and it is said that this figure takes the form of a dog with pure white fur. This dog patrols Catak Hamlet every night and does not attack the villagers if they happen to see it (Interview with Mr Raminto, June 2024).



Figure 3. Lepen in Catak Hamlet

Source: Personal archive

Syncretism: The Offering Tradition in Catak Hamlet, Kebonagung Village

According to Koentjaraningrat (1991), offerings are an important element in religious rituals involving belief in spiritual beings. These offerings are usually made at specific times and places as part of religious rituals. To this day, the tradition of making offerings is still preserved by some members of the Catak hamlet community. This tradition, which has been passed down through generations and combines religious and cultural elements, has become an integral part of the life of the Catak hamlet community. This is in line with the view that religion and culture are two aspects that are closely interrelated and influence one another (Tedi Sutardi, 2007).

The process of syncretism between religious and cultural elements in the offering tradition of Catak Hamlet is underpinned by the local community's strong belief in the continuity of this ancestral tradition. Offerings, regarded as a heritage passed down through the generations, play a vital role as a medium connecting humans with God. For some members of the Catak Hamlet community, the practice of *sesajen* is a tangible expression of gratitude and supplication to the Creator (Wahyana Giri MC, 2010). Offerings in Catak Hamlet are regarded as an essential prerequisite for the performance of traditional ceremonies, one of which is the Nyadran procession. It is believed that failing to provide offerings when organising an event may disrupt the completeness of the ritual and potentially lead to undesirable negative consequences.

The people of Catak Hamlet, when wishing to hold an event such as a Reog performance, a wedding, a slametan or similar occasions, are required to offer ritual offerings at various sites considered sacred and revered. In Catak Hamlet, these sacred sites are the Petilasan Nyai Kedok Tomb, Lepen and Curug. Mr Ruminto stated that, in fact, there are no specific rules regarding the offerings themselves; however, those who understand the requirements will bring offerings such as *kembang mboreh*, *klobot* cigarettes, and *inang*, as these are Nyai Kedok's favourites. (Interview with Mr Ruminto, June 2024).

The hamlet of Catak has no major river, only a spring. Near this spring lies a spring known as 'Lepen', which is considered sacred because it is the burial site of Nyai Jonggrang. Residents usually visit Lepen to pray for safety. This spring is also the site where offerings are placed whenever the residents of Catak are planning an event. The water from the spring is usually used for bathing, washing one's face, and can even be drunk. The residents of Catak Village believe that the water from this spring is blessed, as there was once a sick person who was bathed in the spring and eventually recovered. In addition to Lepen, there is another spring considered sacred, namely Kali Curug (Interview with Mr



Ruminto, June 2024). At this spring, there is a Lepen considered sacred because of Nyai Jonggrang's grave. Residents usually come to Lepen to pray for safety. This Lepen is also the site where offerings are placed whenever the people of Catak Hamlet are planning an event. The water from the spring at the Lepen is usually used for bathing, washing one's face, and can even be drunk. The residents of Catak Village believe that the water from this spring is considered blessed because there was once a sick person who was bathed in the spring and eventually recovered. In addition to the Lepen, there is another spring considered sacred, namely Kali Curug (Interview with Mr Ruminto, June 2024).



Figure 4. Spring in Lepen

Sumber: Personal archive



Figure 5. Kali Curug

Sumber: Personal archive

The items typically included in the offerings are usually seven types of flowers, leaves (coconut leaves, banana leaves, betel leaves), fruits, and food (Humaeni, 2021). Mr Ruminto said that in Catak Hamlet there are actually no specific rules regarding the offerings; as for the food, whatever is available at home may be used as an offering. (Interview with Mr Ruminto, June 2024). However, during observations at several sacred and revered sites where offerings were placed, a beehive was always present. It can therefore be concluded that this beehive is a mandatory component that must be included in the offering at Catak Hamlet.



Figure 6. Offerings at the Shrines of Nyai Kedok, Lepen and Kali Curug

Sumber: Personal archive

Although the people of Catak Village have, for generations, practised the tradition of offering ritual offerings at sacred and revered sites as a form of respect for the spirits of their ancestors, they also demonstrate their adherence to Islamic teachings by reciting the sholawat and the Al-Fatihah whilst performing these rituals. This practice reflects a unique syncretism, in which animist beliefs and Islam



coexist harmoniously in the daily lives of the people of Catak Village. In an agrarian community such as Dusun Catak, the practice of offering offerings is often associated with hopes for fertile soil and protection from disasters. However, by incorporating Islamic elements such as sholawat and Al-Fatihah, this community seeks to strike a balance between traditional beliefs and the religious teachings they adhere to, demonstrating a dynamic cultural adaptation in the face of changing times.

The Offering of Ritual Offerings from an Islamic Perspective

Since Islam first emerged in the Indonesian archipelago, it has become deeply intertwined with the existing culture. This culture has been absorbed and adapted to the norms of Islam. Islam does not eradicate a culture, as it came to validate and correct what had gone astray. The Nyadran tradition practised by the residents of Catak Hamlet is an example of acculturation that arose during the process of syncretism between animist beliefs and Islam. This tradition is not performed to worship anyone, and therefore does not violate the pillars of Islam. The offerings are not intended to associate partners with Allah SWT, but are made as an expression of gratitude for the abundant blessings Allah has bestowed upon the residents of Catak Hamlet and as a plea for safety. Although the offerings in Catak Hamlet are placed in various locations and relate to the ancestors of the Catak people, all are ultimately attributed to Allah SWT.

Regarding the Islamic perspective on this tradition, it can be linked to the explanation of the principle by Imam Shafi'i, who stated that it is better to respect ideas that have emerged within the community—such as the ideas of the Mujtahid Imams—and which serve as a model for society, rather than to dispute the Sunnah where there is still disagreement (Ahmad Kholil, 2011). Islam is a perfect religion because the teachings it contains are closely related to all aspects of human life. Generally, the fundamental teachings of Islam, which are derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith, are classified into three parts: aqidah, sharia, and akhlak. Aqidah refers to teachings concerning a person's beliefs or faith. Sharia comprises teachings regarding the laws governing the conduct of a mukallaf. Meanwhile, akhlak refers to teachings concerning noble ethics (akhlak mulia) (Sony Sukmawan, 2018).

Islam does indeed provide detailed guidance regarding worship, but in other areas it is flexible and adapts to the changing times. Islam neither prohibits nor eliminates cultural elements or customs, provided they do not contravene Islamic law; rather, it simply purifies society of anything that contradicts Tawhid and common sense. The religion of Islam came to guide and lead Muslims towards a better life, so that their lives are balanced between this world and the hereafter. Islam seeks to protect humanity from anything that is not beneficial to their lives; thus, Islam rectifies and guides the cultural customs that have developed within society towards a civilised culture that upholds human dignity, much like the da'wah methods implemented by the Walisongo, who developed local traditions with respect and wisdom whilst remaining within the bounds of Islamic law (Abdullah & Samsul, 2014).

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals a unique and complex manifestation of syncretism in Catak Hamlet, Kebonagung Village. The tradition of offering sacrifices, as an ancestral legacy, has adapted to Islamic teachings, creating religious practices that combine elements of animism and Islamic monotheism. This is evident in rituals such as Nyadran, where the recitation of shalawat and Al-Fatihah is combined with the offering of sesajen. These findings demonstrate the flexibility of Islam in accommodating local cultural practices, in line with the Walisongo's approach to da'wah, which respects local wisdom. The community of Dusun Catak has reinterpreted the meaning of their traditional rituals. Offerings, traditionally associated with animistic beliefs, are now interpreted as a form of gratitude to Allah SWT. This demonstrates that syncretism is not merely a mixture, but also a dynamic process of reinterpretation. This process serves as a bridge enabling the community to preserve their cultural identity whilst adopting Islamic teachings, showing that religious and cultural identities can coexist without negating one another.



These findings offer a new perspective on understanding syncretism, not as a ‘deviation’ from religious orthodoxy, but as a form of creative adaptation that enables the continuity of traditions and the acceptance of new teachings. This challenges the simplistic dichotomy between ‘pure Islam’ and ‘syncretic Islam’, and proposes a more nuanced approach to understanding religious practices within local cultural contexts. This research also highlights the importance of an emic approach to understanding religious practices, paving the way for further studies on how religious identity is formed and negotiated within diverse cultural contexts. In conclusion, syncretism in Dusun Catak is not merely a passive blending of Islam and local beliefs, but an ongoing active process of adaptation and negotiation of meaning, offering valuable insights into the interaction of religion and culture within a local context.

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